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FM AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8021
INFO RUCNMR/MERCOSUR COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 2654
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 4937
RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA PRIORITY 0130
RUEHQ/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 1948
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO PRIORITY 3103

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MONTEVIDEO 000134

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/10/2018
TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER CO VE EC UY
SUBJECT: URUGUAYAN REACTIONS TO FARC COMMANDER'S DEATH

Classified By: Ambassador Frank E. Baxter
for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

1. (C) SUMMARY: The GOU's balanced response to the killing of FARC secretariat member Raul Reyes by Colombian forces inside Ecuadorian territory was remarkable given the internal and external pressures to side with Ecuador and Venezuela. On March 3, the GOU issued a measured statement calling for dialog among Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela to "resolve and overcome their existing differences" and to return their relations to normalcy, a comment that the Colombian ambassador to Uruguay characterized to us as among the region's most "balanced and civilized." Meanwhile, the political arm of the ruling Frente Amplio (FA) party issued a six-point declaration that included a "total rejection and condemnation of the military incursion by the Colombian government into Ecuador." Foreign Minister Fernandez told the Ambassador last Thursday that he wanted Uruguay to become more involved in a solution than in the conflict, in part to restore Uruguay's international image after it had been tarnished by his anti-U.S. predecessor. We do not know what role Uruguay can play in the process since the Rio Group has defused the crisis. Nevertheless, FM Fernandez's intention to once again make Uruguayan diplomacy a force for good in the world is a good development. The views of the resident

Ecuadorian and Colombian ambassadors are also useful for the record. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (SBU) On March 6, the Ambassador and DCM paid a courtesy call on newly-appointed Foreign Minister Gonzalo Fernandez. He told them that he had hoped for a few days of calm to put the MFA's house in order. Instead, he was immediately challenged by the Ecuador-Colombia-Venezuela conflict that began with the March 1 cross-border incident in which 17 FARC guerillas were killed inside Ecuadorian territory by Colombian forces. Fernandez said one of his main aims was to recover Uruguay's international prestige on matters of diplomacy, contributions to international law and the pacific settlement of disputes -- an image that had degraded under his predecessor. He reminded that Uruguay has a long tradition of expertise in international law and a reputation for being both balanced and prudent. Fernandez will attend the March 17 OAS meeting of Foreign Ministers in Washington. He said he wanted Uruguay to meaningfully contribute to the solution of the Colombia-Ecuador conflict and appealed for U.S. support for Uruguay to be part of the process.

¶13. (C) When queried about prospects for more constructive engagement with Uruguay's OAS Perm Rep Lujan Flores, he obliquely answered, "I must strike a delicate balance among what I, the President, the opposition, and my party want. We must walk very carefully over the rocks." (Note: This was in reference to former Foreign Minister Reinaldo Gargano who is now back in the Senate, where he recently tried hard to push through a harsh anti-Colombia resolution. End Note.)

¶14. (C) Regarding the Colombia-Ecuador conflict, Fernandez said he tried to construct a "progressive" strategy based on international law, the promotion of peace and consultations with Mercosur. He claimed to have received little help from Argentina and asserted that Argentine FM Taiana declared that the FARC are not labeled as terrorists in South America, but only by the EU and the UN. He maintained that Argentina plays closely with Venezuela; that Nicaragua contends that the U.S. is using Colombia to conduct a proxy war; and that Mercosur is much more difficult with Chavez inside it.

¶15. (SBU) Ecuadorian Ambassador Edmundo Vera Manzo told the DCM during a courtesy call that Ecuador wanted to hear what the "independent voices of the international organizations" such as ALADI, MERCOSUR and the OAS had to say in the matter. Ecuador also wants a formal apology from Colombia with the firm promise that its "unacceptable" incursion would never again be repeated, he said. He added that the apology should be backed by "confidence building measures" guaranteed by other countries. Vera complained about the GOC's announcement that it would not send any troops to its borders with Venezuela or Ecuador. He asserted it was Colombia's duty to guard the border and prevent further incursions from the FARC.

¶16. (SBU) The DCM also paid a courtesy call on Colombian Ambassador Claudia Turbay, who said that despite difficulties surrounding the conflict, there were important opportunities as well, "because lots of previously hidden truths are now on the table." She lauded the constructive efforts of Uruguay's new Foreign Minister and believed that the GOU's statements on the conflict were among the region's most "balanced and civilized." She noted that the positions of Former FM Gargano and other "hard core Communists" contrasted with the more moderate elements in the FA administration.

COMMENT:

¶17. (C) While Uruguay is not readily apparent as a player in the resolution of the Colombia-Ecuador-Venezuela conflict, FM Fernandez, desire to further engage Uruguay at the OAS is a possibility worth considering. New at the MFA's helm, FM Fernandez is much more pro-U.S. than his predecessor and is already taking a statesman-like approach to Uruguay's foreign policy, as evidenced by his replacement of political appointees at the MFA with career diplomats, regardless of party affiliation. We note that the headquarters of both MERCOSUR and ALADI are located in Montevideo, so that the

GOU's moderate voice can sometimes carry additional weight in
those fora. END COMMENT.

Baxter

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